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# The Royal Canadian Mounted Police



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# **The Royal Canadian Mounted Police**

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Canada's federal police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, is a modern organization as well as a living tradition and a colourful reminder of the romantic aspects of its country's past.

Originally formed to keep order in the vast expanse lying beyond the western boundaries of Manitoba, the RCMP now enforces federal laws in all ten Canadian provinces and polices the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. It also acts, under contract, as the provincial police force in all provinces except Ontario and Quebec and does local policing for about 195 municipalities. Directed and administered from headquarters in Ottawa, the RCMP comprises 16,556 uniformed members, civilian members and special constables as well as 3,615 public service employees.

Soon after the passing of the British North America Act in 1867, the newborn federal government acquired from the Hudson's Bay Company an enormous and potentially rich territory stretching from the Red River Valley in Manitoba west to the Rockies and north from the United States border to the Arctic archipelago. However, before these lands could be developed, law and order had to be established throughout this vast region. The government at Ottawa needed an instrument for the

assertion of its authority and for the enforcement of laws. It also needed to ensure the safe construction of a transcontinental railroad, which was British Columbia's price for entering Confederation.

#### *North West Mounted Police*

Credit for the peaceful settlement of Western Canada rightly falls to the North West Mounted Police, who were organized in 1873 to administer justice in the regions ceded by the Hudson's Bay Company. In July 1874, 275 men rode westward from Fort Dufferin, Manitoba, their mission to pacify the warring tribes and protect the plains country from adventurers. By autumn of the same year, they had made their presence known as far west as the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Two years later, the force had become firmly established and had won the confidence and respect of native chiefs and their people. Devoid of the arrogance and brutality so often displayed by newcomers to the West, the NWMP endeavoured to make law-abiding citizens of both white and red men.

As a semi-military body, modelled partly on the Royal Irish Constabulary, the North West Mounted Police followed the army style in administration and dress. The scarlet tunic, worn earlier by the highly respected and popular soldiers of

Queen Victoria during their years in the West, was from the first an important part of the NWMP uniform, and was destined to become a badge of friendly authority.

### *An early test*

A test for the 214-member force was not long in coming as thousands of Sioux under Chief Sitting Bull sought refuge north of the United States border following the Indian uprising of 1876. Fear of retaliation drove them to Canada after the battle of the Little Big Horn, where a United States cavalry regiment under Lieutenant-Colonel George A. Custer was annihilated.

Tactful handling of the situation, combined with the loyalty of Crowfoot, chief of the great Blackfoot confederacy, whose friendship had been cultivated with clear foresight, led to the Blackfoot Treaty, perhaps the most important Indian treaty in Canadian history. By 1880, the North West Mounted Police had established Canadian sovereignty over the West, and the transition from buffalo hunting to farming was under way.

Less than a decade had passed, however, when this peaceful period came to an end. Construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway heralded settlement of the Prairies, which in turn created reservations and stirred up Indian and Métis resentment

against the intruding Easterners. Demanding redress or compensation for their grievances, the Métis rebelled in the spring of 1885 under the leadership of Louis Riel. Once again, however, the Blackfoot remained loyal and the NWMP were able to bear the strain until militia arrived from the East to quell the uprising.

With the defeat of the rebels and the capture of their leaders, the rebellion came to an end and rapid change and development of the North West followed. New settlers swarmed onto the high plains, which were ideally suited to wheat farming and cattle ranching. Soon a network of patrols spread out from NWMP detachments linking the settlements.

### *Gold rush days*

By 1895, the northern regions of Canada came within the jurisdiction of the force, as thousands of prospectors flocked to the gold-fields of the Yukon. The NWMP moved quickly into the region and established posts at strategic points. Once again, by vigilant and determined law enforcement and a ban on firearms, fewer than 250 members kept murder and serious crime to a minimum. Among their many tasks, the NWMP carried mail to the scattered camps, adding 102,400 km (64,000 miles) in one year alone to northern patrols by boat and dogsled.

After the Boer War, in which many members of the force served

conspicuously with Canadian regiments, settlement of the West accelerated as some 300,000 homesteaders made homes on the plains. A total of 84 detachments stretched from the U.S. border to the Arctic and from Hudson Bay to Alaska.

World recognition came when a NWMP contingent rode through London on Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. In 1904, King Edward VII bestowed on the force the prefix "Royal" in recognition of its service. A year later, the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta were formed; with Manitoba, the western plains were thus divided into the three prairie provinces. For the next ten years, the Mounted Police carried out their varied and often hazardous duties of law enforcement and mercy, covering thousands of miles on horseback, by dog-team, in canoes and in boats. The First World War reduced the strength of the force owing to enlistments in the Canadian and British armed forces; in 1918 the Canadian government authorized the dispatch of two squadrons of RNWMP for service in France and Siberia. After the war, the total strength rose to 1,200.

### *The RCMP*

Canada-wide jurisdiction was extended to the force in 1920, and with this came the present name of Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the

modern era of operations by land, sea and air over an area as large as Europe. Famous patrols in 1924 pushed deep into the Arctic and in 1928 the police schooner *St. Roch* undertook supply and patrol duties in northern waters. Between 1928 and 1932 the RCMP took over provincial police duties in Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba and the three maritime provinces (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island), and absorbed the Preventive Service of the Department of National Revenue. (Provincial police duty in British Columbia and Newfoundland was not added until 1950.)

A marine section was formed in 1932, and played an important role until the Second World War in cutting revenue losses through smuggling, which had been costing the federal Treasury millions of dollars. During the war, 209 officers and men, with 33 ships and boats, were transferred to the Royal Canadian Navy for coastal and sea-going patrols. They filled key positions, as reflected in their casualty rate of 41 per cent. In 1942 the RCMP *St. Roch* became the first ship to navigate the Northwest Passage from west to east. It completed the return voyage in 1944, becoming the first vessel to sail the Passage in both directions.

Long, tedious overland journeys through difficult terrain became less frequent with the advent of air travel

and the formation of an Air Division in 1937. When the Second World War began, the Royal Canadian Air Force took over most Air Division personnel and equipment. Despite this depletion, the RCMP continued to make many flights into the North on police and defence missions until the Division was reformed in 1946.

#### *Second World War service*

The force also contributed a provost company to the Armed Forces as part of the First Canadian Division, which provided the bulk of provost officer personnel to all staff formations. Besides discipline enforcement, traffic duty, collecting information on convoy movements and unit locations, the RCMP were employed at detention barracks, training depots and in special investigation units. In co-operation with the Allied Military government in occupied countries, they helped reorganize and direct civilian police systems, fire departments and civil defence organizations.

A major task of the force during the war was the safeguarding of essential industry, by the use of anti-sabotage and other protective measures. The RCMP not only kept check on draft evaders and deserters but engaged in counter-espionage work, with such success that authorities were able to announce in 1945 that subversive activities in Canada had

been almost wholly disrupted. To cope with the tremendous responsibility with which they were faced, the force had to improvise and, with the assistance of specially-engaged personnel, they guarded vulnerable points and implemented wartime legislation.

#### *The modern force*

Following hostilities, both the air and marine arms of the RCMP were reorganized. The Air Division has since grown to a unit of 28 aircraft, including several with short-take-off-and-landing (STOL) capabilities. Stationed at 24 locations across Canada, they fly over two million air-miles a year on police duties.

Twelve RCMP patrol vessels now perform law-enforcement duties in Canadian territorial waters on the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and on inland waters. Over 350 smaller boats are used on lesser waterways.

Modern assignments range from Arctic patrolling to preventive policing in larger centres, from Criminal Code policing in many cities and towns to the enforcement of laws against drug trafficking, counterfeiting, illicit distilling and Customs evasion, as well as the identification of criminals anywhere in Canada. The RCMP also enforces the Immigration Act and the Canadian Citizenship Act.

To aid in these duties the RCMP has an extensive telecommunications network connecting its posts. Transports, planes and ships are radio-equipped. Modern technology is available in the form of computer equipment at the Canadian Police Information Centre, RCMP Headquarters, Ottawa. It provides the force and other law-enforcement agencies in Canada with immediate access to information on vehicles, licences, stolen property and wanted or missing persons. This information system consists of high capacity computers, data communications lines, and terminals in police offices from coast to coast. A message-switching facility permits any terminal in the system to communicate with any other terminal in Canada.

Six crime detection laboratories across Canada (in Vancouver, Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg, Ottawa and Sackville) employ specialists of varying academic training and experience, who examine a wide variety of material involved in criminal or suspected criminal offences.

The RCMP also represents Canada in INTERPOL. The 126-member body co-ordinates police activities throughout the world and is an important means of exchanging information on criminal investigations and modern methods of law enforcement.

### *Recruitment*

For such a variety of tasks, men and women of many talents are required: each candidate must possess personal integrity, a high degree of intelligence and a sense of responsibility. The selection of recruits is made from applicants who must undergo educational examinations, psychological tests and interviewing.

To qualify, an applicant must be a Canadian citizen resident in Canada, 18 years of age or over, physically fit, able to speak, read and write English or French, and able to drive a car proficiently. The initial enlistment period is for five years and a member is eligible for a life pension after 20 years' service under the provisions of the RCMP Act. Careful selection at the recruit level is followed by periodic interviews throughout the entire career of the member. The recruit's six months of training includes drill, firearms instruction, criminal law, investigation, public relations, swimming, physical training and a great variety of academic and social subjects.

The training and development program is of very wide scope. Advanced training in investigation and management is provided. The Canadian Police College, established in 1938, provides courses in Ottawa to members and personnel of other police forces in Canada and around the world.

### *Organization*

The RCMP is organized under the authority of the RCMP Act. In accordance with the Act, the force is headed by a Commissioner, under the direction of the Solicitor General, who is a member of the federal Cabinet. The force consists of 16 Divisions and a Security Service. Details concerning the Security Service are generally classified and are provided in camera on an annual basis to the Cabinet Committee on Security and Intelligence and the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee of the House of Commons.

One of the most universally recognized features of the RCMP is the Musical Ride, which has been acclaimed throughout Europe and North America as a fine display of horsemanship. The Ride is composed of members of the force who pass a three-month equitation course at Ottawa. The force's band, first established in 1876, has evolved into an élite concert ensemble and plays to audiences approaching half a million a year.





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